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ABSTRACT

This document reports the results of a study of the extent to which civics education and other factors contribute to student political knowledge. In particular, the research focused on how much the civics curriculum, student background, demographics, home environment, and individual student achievement affect 12th graders' awareness of government and politics. Prior studies differ on the contribution of civics education to political awareness. Such diverse findings may be attributable to the different studies' focus on different dependent variables. Even those findings that identify a connection between political education and political knowledge differ regarding the extent of that connection. In recent years, there has been relatively little work comparing course subject matter to civics knowledge and little range in the kinds of political knowledge about which students have been tested. It is important to make a distinction between exposure to political subjects and the selection of subjects that students remember. To be politically knowledgeable, students must be exposed to information and value that selection of information. Exposure is more a matter of structural factors in the curricular and home environment, while selection is an individual and motivational matter. Analysis of National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) data suggests that the school and the civics curriculum are in fact influential in terms of the political awareness and attitudes of U.S. 12th graders. The document contains 50 references and 8 tables. (SG)

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CIVICS COURSES AND THE POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE OF HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS*

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The objective of this paper is to determine the extent to which civics courses, along with other factors, influence what high school seniors know about politics and government. In addition to civics courses and curriculum, we consider background or demographic characteristics, home environment, and achievement characteristics of individual students.

We ask the empirical questions: why do some students know more about their government than others? What accounts for the disparities in political knowledge among high school seniors? A simple answer is that civics knowledge varies because there are great differences in the extent and quality of civics instruction across American high schools. As we will show, however, the answer is not so simple. For one thing, previous research has sometimes rejected civics classes as an important factor at all, and our empirical results--though not our interpretation--mirror earlier findings in some important respects. In addition, classroom instruction--however important--is surely not the only explanation for what students know. Students with the same level of civics education can vary dramatically in their knowledge of American government; likewise, students with little classroom civics instruction may be more politically knowledgeable than students who have taken multiple courses in American government.

We approach our empirical analysis with the following model about student learning. In general, we believe that the political information students are taught and what knowledge about politics they retain are different things. The process of political learning has two distinct but interactive steps. The first step involves *exposure* to civics material--mostly in the classroom and home environment. The second step involves retention of information and is based primarily on what students *select* for storage. Which, if any, material students select depends in large part on what they find relevant to themselves; the determination of relevance is the result of students' social, demographic, and attitudinal traits. These two steps of exposure and selection are interactive in the sense that students do not evenly soak up facts from their textbooks and teachers. The process of being interested, paying attention, and retaining information about American government is

influenced to a great degree by the selection process. We make two basic assumptions with this model: what students are taught in their civics courses has some influence on what they know about American government; and second, that material must be framed and selected by interest in order for it to be stored.

We analyze data from the civics portion of the 1988 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). These data offer an unparalleled opportunity for analysis because of three important properties. First, the 1988 NAEP survey is one of only a few studies that focus on knowledge about American government, and it has a far greater number of items--150 factual questions about American government and its processes--than any other such survey. Second, the NAEP study also contains a good deal of information about the family, school, and classroom circumstances of the students surveyed. Thus, not only do we know about students' political knowledge, we also know quite a bit about the students themselves, such as ethnicity, parents' education, time spent watching television, amount and recency of civics and other courses, and kinds of tasks required in civics courses. Finally, the survey was asked of a representative sample of American high school seniors. Thus, conclusions from our analysis can be generalized to the student population of the nation at large. A detailed description of the 1988 NAEP is included in Appendix A.

BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

One might begin by confirming the obvious: schools and individual classes are often found to have significant effects on student learning. At the college level, one of the earliest and most noteworthy studies was that of Newcomb (1943), who documented the enormous effects of Bennington College on its students in the 1930s and the continuing impact of that education on students' later lives (Newcomb, et al., 1967). More generally, Feldman and Newcomb (1969:326) pointed to attitudinal changes over several decades that can confidently be attributed to the impact of American colleges and universities.

At lower levels of schooling, primarily in high schools, a variety of

studies from around the world have demonstrated the effects of civics instruction and relevant classroom structures and practices. In the 1960s, for example, Litt's (1963) study of several schools in the Boston area found that civics classes had a uniform impact on certain political attitudes and a significant impact on other attitudes under specified conditions. In the 1970s, Patrick (1972) reported that an experimental course designed to introduce modern political science in high schools had an impact on political knowledge and skills of students. Button (1974) and Liebschutz and Niemi (1974) found that experimental curricula influenced aspects of students' political efficacy and knowledge. Torney, Oppenheim and Farnen (1975:332), in a major study of 10 countries, found that even after controlling for home environment, age, and gender, "both the general quality or academic orientation of current and earlier schools and current learning conditions...play a considerable role in determining support for democratic values and knowledge."

Still other, recent studies echo this theme. An evaluation of an experimental course developed in the context of the American bicentennial evidently had a large impact on student knowledge (Stretcher, 1988, though see the methodological criticisms in Farnen, 1990:70-72). Ravitch and Finn (1987:174-179), despite their relatively negative conclusion about student achievement, indicate that the amount and kind of history courses taken by students are related to history knowledge. Elsewhere, Westholm, Lindquist, and Niemi (1990) found a significant impact of both civics and history courses in Sweden, while Denver and Hands (1990) established the effects of civics training in Great Britain, and Wormald (1988) reported school effects in Papua New Guinea.

Despite this series of studies demonstrating educational effects (and the tendency for only positive results to be published), there are also studies that raise important questions about just how influential civics teaching is. The most important of these studies was conducted in the 1960s by Langton and Jennings (1968). They found virtually no impact of civics--either of the

overall number of, or specific types of courses--on a national cross-section sample of high school seniors. A few years later, Merelman (1971) also reported basically negative conclusions about the role of the school in a study of sixth, ninth, and twelfth graders. Liebschutz and Niemi (1974), as noted, found positive effects of an experimental course, but the impact was short-lived. Patrick (1972) and Ehman (1980:101-103) reported that civics instruction generally did not influence civic attitudes. At the college level, studies of political science courses have failed to establish a connection between course-taking or content and political interest and amount of student learning (e.g., Somit et al., 1958; Robinson et al., 1966).

In cross-national work, Farnen and German (1972) reported no evidence of an educational effect on a variety of political attitudes. Farnen (1990:66) argued that the effects reported in Torney, Oppenheim, and Farnen were related to the nature of classroom instruction but not to exposure to civics education as such. In Britain, at least two negative results have evidently been reported (see citations in Denver and Hands, 1990:264). Recently, Morduchowicz (1991), in a small-scale experiment in Argentina, reported resistance to some kinds of civics instruction and an apparent lack of impact on 14 year-old students.

Especially relevant to our work are the mixed and self-contradictory conclusions of the published report of NAEP itself (Anderson, et al., 1990). Highlighted (p. 75) is a statement that "there appears to be a positive relationship between students' average civics proficiency and the amount and frequency of instruction they received in social studies, civics, or American government." However, the authors also note (p. 74) that "it is puzzling... that the amount of civics instruction received appeared to be unrelated to students' proficiency."

Part of the reason for the varied findings about the effects of civics instruction--and important in its own right--is that studies have focused on a variety of dependent variables. Political attitudes have been a frequent concern. In part, at least until research began to raise doubts, this

emphasis was probably due to the presumption that assessing the effects of school on factual knowledge was unnecessary. In addition, however, research on attitudes is considered important because there are strong arguments both that civics courses should help shape youthful opinions and that they should remain neutral toward competing political (especially partisan) arguments.

In any event, political efficacy and trust (or its opposite, cynicism) have often been the focus (e.g., Almond and Verba, 1963, plus many of the studies cited above), as have perceptions of those qualities that make up a good citizen (Jennings and Niemi, 1974), the favorability of attitudes toward government and politics (Hess and Torney, 1967; Sigel and Hoskin, 1981), and understanding of and feelings about law (Hunter and Turner, 1981; Shaver, 1984; Moore, Lare, and Wagner, 1985) and war (Tolley, 1973). Political interest and participation (especially in studies relating achieved education status and level of participation, as summarized in Milbrath and Goel, 1977) have also been studied, and in the 1960s and 1970s there was considerable research on protest activity, especially among college students (e.g., Altbach, 1968; Jennings and Niemi, 1981). We think it safe to say that studies limited to political knowledge as the dependent variable have more consistently found curricular influence (Hyman and Wright, 1979:65-67), though even in this domain findings are not altogether uniform (e.g., Langton and Jennings, 1968).

Studies have varied considerably in just what aspect of the school was found to be influential. Direct classroom instruction is important, of course. But there is a considerable body of literature arguing for the importance of "open" classrooms, in which students are encouraged to express alternative ideas and opinions (see the summary by Patrick and Hoge, 1991:432-434). (Some works in this area are less research than efforts to persuade teachers and administrators of the value of including controversy in civics teaching, but there are genuine research studies.) Similarly, participation in extracurricular activities (e.g., Ziblatt, 1965; Jennings and Niemi, 1974:230), and the organization and governance of the school (Almond and

Verba, 1963; Jennings and Niemi, 1974:221-225; Ehman, 1980:110-112; Leming, 1985:164-168) are thought to affect students' understanding of democratic decisionmaking and willingness to participate in political affairs, although these studies must also be carefully evaluated.

Studies have also varied in their attention to different kinds of students. In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to the potential effects of the school on minorities and on females. However, few of these studies are devoted specifically to the teaching of civics (see the review by Banks, 1991). An exception is Langton and Jennings' (1968) study, in which the authors reported noteworthy effects of civics courses on black students despite their overall negative results; partially supportive results were obtained by Merelman (1971:110-113) and Rodgers (1973). Other studies have assessed courses specifically designed for minorities (Button, 1974; Liebschutz and Niemi, 1974). And, of course, a frequent theme of content analyses of textbooks has been the amount of and kind of attention paid to minority populations (e.g., Ehman, 1977; Glazer and Ueda, 1983). in addition, there is a considerable body of work in political socialization more generally that distinguishes the views of African-American, Hispanic, and other minority youths and of girls versus boys (see, among others, Abramson, 1977; Garcia, 1973; Jaros and Kolson, 1974; Owen and Dennis, 1988).

There has been relatively little work relating the subject matter of courses to civics knowledge. (On "values clarification" and its effects on attitudes, a host of studies exists; see Leming, 1985). Langton and Jennings (1968) considered the possibility of differential effects of several kinds of civics courses (e.g., Problems of Democracy versus American Government) as well as possible spillover effects of history courses, but with no success. Ravitch and Finn (1987:174) noted in passing that having had civics and geography courses is of no consequence for knowledge of history. There have been analyses of specific new courses (e.g., Patrick, 1972), and there are numerous content analysis of textbooks (Ehman, 1977:81-88; Patrick and Hoge, 1991). However, as Ehman and Hahn (1981:70) noted, "we know little or nothing

about what students actually learn from their textbooks." Leming (1985:181-182) echoed this point as well. Likewise, much of the civics research has been "global" in nature, focusing on course-taking as such, though it is clear from evaluations of specific courses as well as from larger-scale studies that the amount of time students devote to the subject (Anderson, et al., 1990:76) and subject matter covered (Ravitch and Finn, 1987:179) are of considerable importance.

Another way in which previous studies have been restricted is in the extent of and kinds of political knowledge about which students have been tested. As earlier noted, we have available 150 items covering a variety of topics about American government and politics. Most other studies of information have been limited to a far more restricted number. Langton and Jennings (1968), for example, had only six factual questions; Rodgers (1973) had four; Sigel and Hoskin (1981) had 15; Bachman (1969) had five; Westholm, Lindquist, and Niemi (1990) had eight. Torney et al. (1975) had a much more extensive base, but even they had only a third of the number of items available in the NAEP study.

While the literature thus varies tremendously in both method and findings, common to most of the research are the absence of extensive measures of political information and the dearth of detailed study of both the nature and timing of civics coursework. In addition, studies have often been narrowly focused, with an absence of a general analytical framework within which to analyze the data. In the next section, we propose the general framework that we will use to understand why some students learn a good deal about government and politics while others accumulate much less in the way of citizenship education.

HOW STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

We identify two general features that determine what and how students know about politics. The first is a set of characteristics that *determines the exposure* students to political information; the second is a set of characteristics that regulates the *selection* of information to be remembered.

We believe the processes of exposure and selection are distinct and identifiable but that they are most meaningful to political learning when considered together. In order to understand what knowledge high school students have about American government and why they know what they do, it is vital to analyze both of these processes together.

The importance of the two processes is perhaps best conveyed with an example. Someone who has no background and interest in violent contact sports may, repeatedly and over a series of days, view a television commercial advertising a major prize fight. Without interest in the spectacle, and the motivation to watch, the broadcast time of the event and the names of the participants will simply wash over the viewer. Simple exposure to information does not guarantee the retention of all or any of the information; who will box, and when, is information of little or no relevance and interest to this particular viewer, and regardless of the number of times the advertisement is broadcast, the viewer does not select it for retention. Of course one who has a fondness for boxing but does not watch television regularly will also be less likely to know the details of the broadcast of the prize fight; this second viewer has not been exposed to any of the relevant information. Interest and motivation alone are neither sufficient conditions for the retention of information.

While we are not arguing that watching television and the educational experience are the same, the point of the example remains: students must both be exposed to political information as well as value the selection of that information in order to be politically knowledgeable. Each of the processes of exposure and selection is, by itself, a necessary but not sufficient condition for retaining political information. However, taken together, they constitute a general analytical framework for what and how students learn about American government. It is the interaction of exposure and selection that determine what students know about government.

The distinction between these two processes is useful in another way. How much and in what way students are exposed to the study of politics is

determined largely by *structural* factors, primarily features of the home and of the civics curriculum. Students have relatively little control over these characteristics. In contrast, what students select for retention is determined most heavily by *individual* or *motivational* factors. These, obviously, are more under the control of the student; structural features, such as the amount of civics instruction, are unlikely to substitute for individual attributes.

Within the four kinds of factors we identify and analyze below--school and civics curriculum, home environment, individual achievement, and background/demographics--we consider some to contribute primarily to exposure and others mostly to the process of motivation and selection. The differences are not razor-sharp. All of the characteristics probably contribute, to some degree, to both exposure and selection. In addition, each of these factors is multifaceted. The educational background of parents, for example, helps determine which school district a student lives in and thereby affects the amount of exposure to civics courses. Yet we suspect that by far the greater importance of parents' education levels is in the degree to which they motivate and encourage students to retain what civics material they are introduced to. Accordingly, Table 1 presents aspects of each of these four factors and categorizes them according to whether they are primarily structural--encouraging exposure--or individual--contributing to selection.

Exposure: Structural Factors

The structural factors listed in Table 1 control, to a large extent, the formal exposure of students to facts about American government. Of the seven characteristics listed, the first three are aspects of the school and civics curriculum. The amount of civics coursework--the most studied of our set of explanatory variables--should have a positive impact on how much students know about government. Quite simply, students who have taken more civics courses have been exposed to more information about American government. Yet almost any learning has a limited shelf life; facts and figures about governmental organization and processes may be especially likely to be forgotten if they

are not constantly reinforced. This helps explains why certain selection and individual achievement factors, noted below, are important. It should also mean that the recency of student coursework is a factor in student knowledge. We thus incorporate both amount of and recency of coursework in the first of our structural factors. Students who were required to discuss current events and politics in class and who studied a variety of topics in civics have also been exposed to more information and viewpoints about government. Thus, we anticipate that these features will also enhance student knowledge, and we incorporate them as well under the curriculum heading.

In addition to characteristics of the school and civics curriculum, we identify three aspects of the home environment that influence the exposure students have to American government and politics: the availability and variety of reading and reference materials in the household, living in a two-parent household, and speaking only English at home. Having easy access to reading materials at home, including newspapers, magazines, books and encyclopedias, brings the world of politics into the home of the student. Availability does not guarantee exposure--a teenager could studiously avoid rather than study these materials--so, again, we see that individual characteristics must also be incorporated into the model. It is likely, however, that a greater presence of reading and reference material in the home environment means that students are exposed to more information about government. Having two parents in the household ensures that there will be adult conversations. Some, almost certainly, will involve politics and government--thereby enhancing the student's exposure to political issues and topics. Finally, if only English is spoken at home, it is more likely that students will be exposed to issues particular to *American* politics.

Race and ethnicity we characterize both as structural and individual factors. That they are individual characteristics is obvious and must be recognized. And they are truly individual in that, for a variety of historical and other reasons, they affect the selection of civics cues that people pay attention to and are likely to remember. Yet race and ethnicity

are not directly measures of individual achievement or motivation in the way that characteristics such as liking civics materials are, so they are something else as well. That something else is at least partly structural in nature. We know, for example, that black and Hispanic students, for the most part, go to school in lower income school districts and probably get inferior classroom teaching and materials. Hence, we categorize race/ethnicity as structural as well as individual and recognize that the individual component is somewhat different from the other factors under that heading.

Selection: Individual Factors

The individual characteristics of home environment, individual achievement, and background affect the selection of political information to store. Unlike the structural characteristics, these characteristics primarily influence the *retention* of political facts by *selecting* which political facts are more or less important to remember or are more or less likely to be remembered for other reasons. These individual factors measure the incentives students have to learn about politics.

We consider two aspects of the home environment as relevant individual characteristics influencing selection: educational level of the parents and hours of television viewing by the student. The educational level of parents often indicates the expectations they have for their children; more highly educated parents expect their children to earn as much or more education as they themselves have. As a result, students with more highly educated parents typically have a greater incentive to learn about government (and many other topics) and to remember more of what they have been taught. These students will likely continue their formal education beyond high school and will therefore need a greater storehouse of knowledge in order to succeed at the next stage of their education in college. In contrast, the more hours students spend watching television, the less time they can spend reading, doing homework, and interacting with friends and family. More television viewing indicates less desire or incentive to learn and remember lessons from civics and other classes.

In addition to the characteristics of the home environment that contribute to the selection of political information for retention, we consider three additional characteristics of individual achievement: participation in student government, whether the student likes to study civics and government, and the student's plans after high school. Participation in extracurricular school activities such as student government demonstrates the student's interest in politics, as does the student's enjoyment of civics and government classes. These measures both demonstrate and create incentives for students to select political knowledge for storage and retention. We also consider intent to study at a four-year college as a relevant factor in selection. Students who intend to continue their education in a four-year college have a greater incentive to retain the information they were exposed to in high school.

A final characteristic we categorize as individual is that of gender. While students certainly do not choose their gender, males and females have somewhat distinctive tastes when it comes to the subjects they like. Male students are more likely than female students to say that government is their favorite subject or that they enjoy civics classes more than their other classes. Thus, male students have a greater incentive to pay attention to and remember the material they study in their civics courses.

These distinctions between "structural" characteristics that influence exposure to political information, and "individual" characteristics that motivate selection of political knowledge for retention are not as clear in practice as they are in theory. All of them, in some way or in some circumstances, could be considered either structural or individual. The amount of television viewing, to take one obvious example, could be partly imposed--e.g., by the degree to which other family members watch television--and in that sense be part of the structure that determines how much a student is exposed to politically-relevant material. Nonetheless, the analytical framework that we have outlined is useful as a heuristic--to separate possible steps in the complicated process by which students learn about politics--even

if it is not an absolute guide to how students learn. It is with this caveat in mind that we use the framework of exposure and selection in building the model that we will estimate of why some students know more about politics than others.

THE MODEL

The Dependent Variables

We are interested in why some students are more knowledgeable about American government than others. The NAEP study was based on a three-dimensional conceptualization of knowledge organized around context, content, and cognition. *Context* was a reference to home, school, community, state, nation, and world, and was particularly relevant for contrasts between earlier and later grades. It will not concern us here. *Content* was defined in terms of four broad areas of subject matter falling under the civics umbrella: democratic principles and the purpose of government; structures and functions of political institutions; political processes; and rights, responsibilities, and the law. Ultimately, we wish to consider in detail the sources of knowledge about each of these areas. That shall have to await a later paper, however.

Cognition was a way of saying that students must not only know political facts but that they must be able to "understand and apply" information they have learned ("to interpret information and be aware of how concepts, facts, and principles are interrelated") (Civics Objectives, 1987, p. 10). Operationally, most of the "test" questions in the survey are quite straightforward requests for specific factual information: How many representatives does each state have in the House? Which of four listed groups is most likely to vote in presidential elections? How is the Chief Justice selected? What is the meaning of the right to counsel? And so on. Some questions, however, are more interpretive: One asks students to indicate which of the answers best summarizes the information in a simple bivariate table. Another has a short dialogue and asks what conflict is expressed in this dialogue. Another states that "Governments are instituted among Men..."

and asks which of several theories the statement reflects. Detailed analysis of these different kinds of questions also await a later paper, but it should be recognized that dependent variable used here captures somewhat more than simply an ability to recite facts and figures.

In this paper, we are concerned with the effects of the civics curriculum on overall knowledge about American government and politics. To this end, the main dependent variable is the percentage of questions each individual answered correctly, without distinction to subject matter or type (factual or interpretative). Each student answered from 50 to 75 items, but, as noted in Appendix A, the set of questions varied across students. In all cases, the questions were multiple choice, with four answers provided. An effort was made to select questions of varying difficulty. That goal was admirably achieved, as the distribution in Table 2 shows. As noted there, the average percentage correct for the entire sample of high school seniors was 66.0.

We shall also pay some attention to a question that asked a subset of students to name the current president (89 percent correctly named Ronald Reagan) and to write a description of his primary responsibilities. Answers were judged to be "unacceptable," "minimal," "adequate," or "elaborated."

In addition to the overall measure of political knowledge and the presidential responsibilities question, we consider two attitudinal items, both taken from the National Election Studies. The first asks students their views on governmental responsiveness: "Over the years, how much attention do you feel the government pays to what people think when it decides what it wants to do?" The second asks about elections and governmental responsiveness: "How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what people think?" Both questions asked students to respond "a good deal," "some," or "not much." While these items are very limited in scope--they were the only attitude questions included in the NAEP study--they will permit a glimpse into the political attitudes of high school seniors and into the role of structural and individual characteristics in the formation of those attitudes.

The Independent Variables: What Factors Might Make a Difference?

We begin by describing more precisely the measurements of the structural and individual factors noted above and, for civics coursework, showing initial, presumptive evidence that they affect students' knowledge and attitudes. We shall ultimately bring together all of the independent variables to see how they fare in a multivariate test.

The first set of factors consists of the structural characteristics of the civics curriculum that help determine the exposure of students to civics material in the schools. These are the most important variables for our purposes and the most difficult to assess. Though school records would have been more reliable, the decision was made by NAEP administrators to use self-reports. Consequently, students were asked several questions about the amount of American government or civics course work they had received. One such question was relied on in the NAEP report referred to earlier (Anderson, et al., 1990, p. 75): "Since the beginning of ninth grade, how much American government or civics course work have you completed up to now." Despite NAEP's own use of this item, we were concerned both with the ambiguity of the question (logically, students should not have included courses in which they were currently enrolled) and the fact that it ignored the timing of those courses.

Our measure of civics coursework was based instead on a series of four questions: "Did you take or do you expect to take a course in American government or civics in the following grades? Ninth? Tenth? Eleventh? Twelfth? Each item was to be answered Yes or No. Though the question did not say explicitly that current courses were to be counted as a "yes," we think the chances of excluding such courses is less than with the overall question. And since the respondents we are using here were in the second semester of twelfth grade, we do not have to worry about whether a yes response meant that the student had taken or expected to take such a course. In addition, this set of questions allowed us to build in the recency of civics coursework.

Based on these four questions, we first constructed a variable that

finely differentiated both the amount and recency of civics instruction. There was, however, a somewhat ragged relationship between the categories of this variable and the percentage of civics questions answered correctly. Reasoning that recency played a larger role than we had anticipated, we collapsed this variable into the five categories shown in the left-hand side of Table 3. Several points emerge from this initial look at the possible effects of the civics curriculum on student knowledge of American government and politics.

First, there is a relatively large difference in civics knowledge between those who have had no civics courses and those who have had one or more--even if that course was in 9th or 10th grade. Unless contradicted by later results, it appears as if there is a threshold effect. The process may be two-fold. A civics course may simply impart some specific facts that students would not otherwise learn. It may also encourage students to pay greater attention than they otherwise would to what is happening in the world around them, suggesting the possibility of a longer-term effect. Whatever the process, the bivariate evidence suggests that being introduced to the study of government and politics and learning some of the terms and concepts with which contemporary social phenomena can be understood substantially increases one's knowledge of civics.

It should be noted, however, that almost all students receive at least a minimum of civics training. Only about eight and one-half percent said they had not had any civics course in high school. Indeed, our first inclination was to assume that even this small group was somehow exceptional, perhaps consisting mostly of recent immigrants, of students with learning disabilities, and so on. However, this is not the case. Thus, the results so far appear to be highly encouraging. The threshold of an initial introduction to civics is overcome by the vast majority of students, but those who do not appear to suffer for it.

A second point made by the five-fold division in Table 3 is support for the contention that recency is what is most important. Both groups with a

civics course in 12th grade had higher scores than those who had completed their civics work a year or more earlier. To that extent the findings are again supportive--at this point in the analysis--of the argument that civics courses have a positive impact on student knowledge.

Having said that, the results also suggest the somewhat disturbing conclusion that coursework beyond an introduction to the subject is of little consequence. In fact, if the numbers are to be believed, having had civics in 12th grade *and* in one or more earlier years in high school leaves one less knowledgeable than coursework exclusively in the 12th grade. Such an interpretation can conceivably be "explained away." It may be that many of those who report multiple courses had completed their coursework before the spring of 1988, while most of those with courses in 12th grade only were in the midst of such a course at the time of testing. Such an "explanation" is a bit far-fetched, however, and the results suggest that later conclusions about the role of civics courses must be tempered by an awareness of the apparently limited role of anything beyond an introductory course (or perhaps current enrollment in a civics class).

In light of the seemingly exclusive importance of recency and the questionable effects of classes beyond the first, our later analysis will be based on a further collapsing of the variable measuring civics coursework. On the right-hand side of Table 3 we show the mean percentage correct for those with no civics courses, those with one or more courses but none beyond the 11th grade, and those with a course in the 12th grade (with or without any previous course). Fortunately for analytical purposes, there is a substantial number of students in each of these groups--8.6 percent, 31.1 percent, and 60.3 percent, respectively. Overall, the three-category variable makes important distinctions in conceptual terms and in terms of the division of students among its components.

A final point about Table 3 is simply a cautionary one. Given the small number of students with no civics courses and the small difference between the two higher categories (on the right-hand side), we will be surprised if this

relationship holds up under the onslaught of a multivariate model involving all of the structural and individual variables we introduced above. It may be that the evidence supportive of civics course effects--limited as it is--will disappear as we move forward. We shall see.

Using the final, "recency" coding of the coursework variable, we also take a brief look at its relationship to knowledge of presidential responsibilities and the two attitudinal questions at our disposal. Table 4 shows a modest but clear pattern of more knowledgeable answers to the responsibilities question with recency of coursework. As with the knowledge scale, there is a larger difference in going from no civics to some than in going from prior-year to more recent work. Tables 5 and 6 also show a modest relationship with students' attitudes; here, the differences are less consistently stronger after the first move. In both cases, students became more positive about the responsiveness of the government with some, or more recent, civics coursework.

Our two other measures of the civics curriculum are relatively straightforward. Both are based on student descriptions of the nature of their civics courses. Students were asked "Since the beginning of ninth grade, how much have you studied the following topics in American government or civics?" Ten topics were listed--e.g., Congress, state and local government, rights and responsibilities of citizens. In each case, students were asked to indicate "a lot," "some," or "not at all." In later work we shall be interested in whether topics identified by the students as well covered are associated with greater knowledge in those specific areas. For now, we are interested simply in whether or not students reported that their courses covered a variety of topics. Most reported that at least some topics were discussed frequently, so the distinction we use is between those who thought their courses covered a broad range of subjects and those who thought that the coverage was not quite so wide. The coding and distribution are provided in Appendix B.

The final measure of the civics curriculum is based on another set of

descriptions of the courses. Students were asked "How often has your American government or civics teacher asked you to do the following things for class" Five responses were given, ranging from "almost every day" to "never." Most of the list of 10 items (such as reading material from your textbook, working on a group project) were unrelated to civics knowledge. One, however, showed a strong relationship with student knowledge. The more frequently students discussed current events, the greater their ability to answer questions about government and politics.

All of the other variables that we will introduce into our multivariate model--home environment, individual achievement, and background--require little explanation. Like those described above, all are based on student reports about themselves or their homes and families (see Appendix B for coding and distributions). At a bivariate level, all are related to civics knowledge. Not surprisingly, many of them--especially the set describing the home environment--are related to each other as well. The intercorrelations are not so high as to cause estimation problems in our multivariate analysis, but they are sufficiently related to each other that only some may remain significant when combined in the full model. We now turn to the results of that model.

RESULTS

The full array of structural and individual variables introduced above was included in an ordinary least squares regression with the civics knowledge scale as the dependent variable. The results are shown in the left-hand column of Table 7. With the exception of race/ethnicity and amount of television viewing, all of the variables are coded so that positive coefficients were to be expected. As it turns out, all are in the expected direction and all are statistically significant.

Least surprising, and of least importance for our present inquiry, is that all of the home environment variables and background characteristics have a significant, often strong, relationship to the percentage of questions students were able to answer correctly. Despite the presence of numerous

controls, being black or Hispanic reduces by nearly 9 1/2 and 6 1/2 percentage points, respectively, the proportion of correct answers. We do not attempt a full exploration of these results--whether still other controls would reduce the size of the impact, whether there is any cultural bias in the kinds of questions asked, and so on. The persistence and size of these effects is troubling, but for our present inquiry into the effects of civics courses, the important point is that we account for background differences. Equally disturbing--except for its smaller size--is the effect of gender. Though much of the research we reviewed earlier led us to expect a continuing difference between males and females, it remains troublesome to see that in the late 1980s high school boys still outperform girls by several percentage points.

The effect of each of the home environment factors is somewhat smaller, but collectively they too account for a considerable difference in the knowledge of the high school seniors. Students who are at the "bottom" on each of these variables--with few or no reading materials at home, where a language other than English is spoken or only one parent is present or the parents have a high school education or less, and who spend lot of time watching television--are predicted to score as much as 15 percentage points below those at the "top" end. And unfortunately, from a societal point of view, the numbers in the low categories (on each factor individually) are far from trivial (see Appendix B).

This brings us to the school and individual achievement factors. The first important point to note is that, despite the variety of home and background characteristics for which we have controlled, each of these factors remains significantly related to student knowledge. We have uncovered here a number of school-related factors that contribute positively to awareness and understanding of information about American government and politics. Collectively, as with the home environment, they add up to a considerable impact.

Of singular interest, perhaps, is the top-most coefficient in Table 7. It indicates that having had a civics or American government course in 12th

grade gives one about a two-percentage point edge over someone whose last course was earlier and another two point edge over a student who had no civics at all. It would be easy, of course, to make light of this difference. Two-to-four percentage points, after all, is not very much. Note, however, that this effect is net of all the other influences. Even controlling for some of what occurs as a direct result of civics classes (plus home environment, etc.), recent exposure to such a course raises students' scores. Moreover, the increase, though small, is no less than that brought about by changes in a number of other variables.

This interpretation of the impact of civics courses--together with the fact of its persistence in a multivariate context--is uncommonly meaningful. It suggests a solution to one of the enduring puzzles in the field of political socialization--the (evidently) utter absence of effect of civics courses in what heretofore was the major political science analysis, that done 25 years ago by Langton and Jennings (1968). The authors of that report concluded that "the magnitude of the relationships [between civics courses and a number of dependent variables] are extremely weak, in most instances bordering on the trivial.... Indeed, the increments are so minuscule as to raise serious questions about the utility of investing in government courses in the senior high school..." (p. 858). Our interpretation is in sharp contrast to their pessimism. An impact of "only" a few percentage points, when it resists efforts to explain it away and when it rivals the impact of other important variables, is anything but trivial. It remains a small impact, but it is hardly one on which to base speculations about the elimination of civics classes altogether.*

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*In the Langton-Jennings study the overall difference in political knowledge between those with no civics courses and those with one or more is slightly over four percent (calculated from the results by race on p. 860). Given the percentages in the various categories (32 percent in their study had taken no course; here 35 percent had taken no course in 12th grade), this might best be compared with the three percentage point gap observed in Table 3 between those with their last course in 9-11th grade and those with a course in 12th grade. There are numerous differences between our two studies, so the striking similarity of the three and four percent figures may be sheer coincidence. Yet it is intriguing at the very least. Likewise, there are a variety of reasons for Langton and Jennings' interpretation versus our own--e.g. they analyzed a larger number of dependent variables and found little effect on any of them. Nevertheless, for the reasons indicated in the text, we think that our interpretation is the more reasonable one, at least with respect to political knowledge. See also our results below on attitudes.

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As we have already noted, not only do the courses themselves have an impact, so too do other factors that are a direct outgrowth of the civics curriculum. When the courses include a variety of topics, students respond with the ability to answer a larger percentage of the test questions. This makes sense in two ways. First, it may simply be that the broader courses covered certain test items that the narrower courses failed to include. But equally important, it may be that wider coverage gave students a broader framework within which to fit various facts and figures and therefore a greater ability to remember (or deduce) them. To take a simple example, knowing something about the advise and consent role of the Senate might help one remember the relatively greater length of Senate versus House terms.

Frequent discussions of current events are another course-related factor that improves student test scores. It may be that current events are sufficiently stimulating to students that they pay more attention to the content of their civics courses. Or it may be that the context of current events gives meaning to learning in a way that enables students to retain more of what they learn. Whatever the explanation, this particular aspect of civics courses appears to leave an appreciable mark on students' knowledge.

Thus, school-related structural factors, which to a large extent regulate student exposure to civics content, are important predictors of student knowledge. But so, too, are the individual factors that help determine what students select from all that is made available. The most important of the achievement factors--whether a student plans to attend a four-year college after graduation--is very likely a summary of many factors in student's abilities, interests, and environment, and it is as powerful a predictor as race/ethnicity. Its importance here is that in choosing factors to control, we have included a very general measure of student achievement/ability.

The final two variables are perhaps unsurprising in their bivariate effect. Yet it is noteworthy that both remain significant when brought together. One might well have expected that those who like the study of civics would be the ones most likely to participate in student government, so

that including the former in the model would have shown the bivariate relationship between participation and knowledge to be spurious. Instead, insofar as we can tell, participation genuinely enhances student knowledge. Of course student government is not a part of civics coursework per se. Yet here is another school-related factor that helps raise student scores on the civics test. Altogether, instead of being of questionable importance, a variety of school factors--coursework and otherwise--contribute handsomely to the development of citizenship knowledge.

The multivariate results for the other dependent variables are generally in line with the observations made about the civics knowledge scale. However, with only a single-item dependent variable (meaning lower reliability), and, in the case of the responsibility question, less than half the number of cases, it is not surprising that the predictive ability (R^2) is much lower and that a number of variables in each equation are no longer significant. The results are shown in the right-hand side of Table 7 and in Table 8.

A number of the findings are of potential interest. For example, the fit of the equations is especially low for the attitudinal items, and a number of "standard" differences apply much less well to them. (When judged by standardized coefficients, to take account of the differing scales, race/ethnicity, parents's education, and college plans all have much lower coefficients for the attitude items.) Similarly, it is probably not coincidence that the coefficients for blacks and Hispanics are negative and significant for the item on "attention paid to people" but insignificant for the other opinion question. As before, however, our interest is in the school-related factors.

Of the school-related structural features, the variety of items covered and the frequency of discussing current events are generally significant; recency of civics coursework is significant for one of the attitudes. Thus, as expected, overall support for the importance of the curriculum is weaker here than for the knowledge scale, but it is relatively strong nonetheless. The role of individual characteristics is well supported in these results.

Liking the subject of government is significant throughout, while participating in student government is significant for both attitudinal matters. The broader factor of college plans is closely related to all three items. These results thus bolster our confidence that civics courses, through a variety of mechanisms, affect political knowledge and that they may be a positive influence on citizenship attitudes as well.

CONCLUSION

For the past two decades or more, a persistently held view among political scientists has been that civics courses matter little in the education of each new generation of adults. Our work challenges this view. Based on a more extensive test of political knowledge than in any previous study--one calling for understanding and interpretation as well as recitation of facts and figures--and a multivariate model including home, background, and multiple school-related factors, we found that civics classes themselves and other closely related features had a small but resilient impact on the civics knowledge of high school seniors. Our evidence about students' citizenship attitudes was far less extensive and can only be regarded as suggestive. Yet it, too, indicated that factors related to the civics curriculum are an important component of what young people think about the world of government and politics.

It should be emphasized that our measure of civics coursework was different from that in some other studies, including NAEP's own analysis. For the large majority who had taken at least some civics work, the variable categorized students not by the number of such courses but by their recency. The significance of this distinction may lie in the fact that we are dealing with preadults--teenagers, who are not and cannot be much involved in real world politics. Indeed, 17 year-olds are only slightly beyond the age at which children first come to understand politics in a more or less adult fashion. Not until ages 13-15 do young people begin to grasp many of the concepts that are essential to an understanding of political life (Adelson and O'Neill, 1966).

New, and still peripheral involvement in the world of politics means that most high school seniors lack the almost-daily stimulus that adults receive from on-going political events. That this is so should hardly be surprising. One of the lessons of early studies of voting and public opinion is that many adults--even those in their middle and later years--are less than fully engaged in the political world. Some lack the conceptual tools to fully understand politics; others are simply uninterested. Knowing this, should we expect large numbers of high school seniors to pay attention to and to understand politics without the stimulus provided by current or recent coursework?

A standard finding in research on participation is that young adults--people in their 20s--do not vote and are not otherwise involved in politics as frequently as middle-aged and older citizens. The usual explanation is that young adults have other tasks that are accorded higher priority, such as completing their education, finding a spouse, getting a job. In addition, having low incomes, not owing homes, not having school-aged children, and so on, gives them little incentive to become involved. If this is true of 20 to 30 year-olds, how much more does it characterize those who are not yet adults or who have only recently reached adult status (and then not in every respect)? Indeed, the wonder is that students can be made to think about and remember much at all about something as remote as politics.

This perspective also sheds light on why frequent discussions of current events and participation in student government contribute to political knowledge. Whether students intend it or not, real world politics is beginning to intrude upon their psyches, The more they are shown that the theories and concepts and facts and figures in civics courses help take some of the mystery out of this new phenomenon, the more likely they are to remember that material. Information from civics classes, we might speculate, is not so closely tied in a young person's mind to future work the way that, say, math and science are. But if a major aspect of adult life can only be understood with that kind of information, then at least some students will

regard it as worth learning.

In an effort to explain why school-related factors are important, we do not in the least wish to deny the importance of non-school factors. Indeed, the analytical framework we set forth at the outset took explicit account of home and background characteristics. Our findings did nothing to alter this view. All of the non-school factors we identified--some to our dismay as members of society--proved to be very important in understanding why certain seniors are more knowledgeable than others.

Here, however, our interest lay in civics courses and related factors. What we have discovered is that, when it comes to high school seniors' knowledge of American government and politics, the school and the civics curriculum do matter.

APPENDIX A: DESIGN OF THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is an ongoing, congressionally mandated project established in 1969 to obtain comprehensive data on the educational achievement of American students. NAEP is directed by the National Center for Educational Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education and is administered by the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey. It monitors student ability in a wide variety of fields.

During 1988, NAEP tested students in reading, writing, U.S. history, geography, and civics. Students were from three groups: 9 year-olds (4th graders), 13 year-olds (8th graders), and 17 year-olds (12th graders). Two types of civics assessments were conducted. The first was designed to monitor trends in knowledge of citizenship and social studies among 13 year-olds/8th graders and 17 year-olds/12th graders. Scores of students were related to those from earlier NAEP studies.

The second civics assessment, which we shall use, was designed to evaluate student knowledge and understanding of U.S. government and politics. Approximately 11,000 fourth graders/9 year-olds, eighth graders/13 year-olds, and twelfth graders/17 year-olds, in 1000 private and public schools across the country were tested. In this paper, the analysis will be limited to 12th graders. (The target population for the high school portion of the study was students who were *either* in twelfth grade or were 17 years old.) The number of 12th graders, before deletions for missing data, is 4275. They were drawn from 304 schools. For descriptive purposes, it is necessary to weight the cases. We do so, though we report unweighted N's as a conservative indication of the precision of the estimates. The regressions are based on unweighted N's.

Questionnaires for 12th graders included a common background section asked of all students. In addition, 150 multiple response questions were asked in order to inquire about a wide range of material relating to U.S. government and politics (as described in the text). In order to avoid fatigue, individual students were given a response booklet containing a

smaller number of questions. Most booklets contained about 75 questions; a few contained about 50. The dependent variable used here--the percentage of questions answered correctly--is thus unusual in that it is not based on an identical set of questions for each respondent. This does not present a validity problem, however. Random "spiraling" was used to interleaf the booklets "in regular (systematic) sequence so that each booklet appears an appropriate number of times in the sample" and "the students within an assessment session were assigned booklets in the order in which the booklets were bundled" so that "typically, each student in an assessment session received a different booklet and, even in schools with multiple sessions, only a few students received the same booklet or block of items" (Johnson, Zwick, et al. 1990 p. 29). Questionnaires for 12th graders were administered between January 4 and May 18, 1988.

The school participation rate (for the 12th grade/17 year-old sample) was 82.8 percent. The participation rate among students was 78.5 percent (Anderson, et al. 1990, p. 94).

A complete description of the design and implementation of the 1988 NAEP study is found in Johnson, Zwick, et al. (1990).

APPENDIX B: CODING AND DISTRIBUTIONS OF THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Description of variable Coding	Percentage of students (Unweighted N)
Amount and recency of civics coursework	
None (0)	8.6
Last in 9th, 10th, or 11th grade (1)	31.1
12th grade (2)	60.3
	(4275)
Variety of civics topics studied	
Little or none (1)	3.2
Some (2)	55.3
A lot (3)	41.4
	(4262)
Discussed current events in class	
Never (or no civics) (1)	26.6
A few times a year (2)	3.9
Once or twice a month (3)	9.2
Once or twice a week (4)	28.1
Almost every day (5)	32.1
	(4248)
Variety of topics studied	
Little or no variety (1)	3.2
Some variety (2)	55.2
A good deal of variety (3)	41.2
	(4262)
Comment: Some students surely misunderstood the question inasmuch as seven percent elsewhere in the questionnaire reported no civics classes.	
Reading and reference materials in the home	
None (0)	1.1
One (1)	2.9
Two (2)	8.8
Three (3)	24.3
Four (4)	63.0
	(4275)
Language spoken at home	
Always or sometimes non-English (0)	25.4
Always English (1)	74.4
	(4265)
Two-parent household	
Only one parent (0)	25.4
Both parents at home (1)	74.6
	(4275)
Educational level of parents	
Grade school (1)	7.5
High school (2)	24.5
Some college (3)	24.5
College graduate (4)	43.5
	(4164)

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Amount of television viewing	
None (1)	2.9
1 hour or less (2)	24.9
2 hours (3)	25.4
3 hours (4)	19.0
4 hours (5)	14.0
5 hours (6)	7.2
6 hours or more (7)	6.6
	(4261)
Participation in student government	
Never (1)	52.1
Once or twice (2)	36.3
Several times (3)	11.6
	(4242)
How much you like to study government	
Never studied it (1)	2.1
Like others better (2)	46.5
It is interesting (3)	41.3
My favorite subject (4)	10.1
	(4244)
4-year college planned after graduation	
No (0)	46.9
Yes (1)	53.1
	(4275)
Race (dummy variables; "all others" excluded)	
Black (1)	11.8
Hispanic (1)	8.4
All others (0)	79.9
	(4275)
Gender	
Female (0)	51.6
Male (1)	48.4
	(4275)

Table 1

The Context for Learning: Measures of Exposure to Civics Instruction and of Selection of Information for Retention

	Exposure (Structural)	Selection (Individual)
1. CIVICS CURRICULUM		
Amount and recency of civics coursework	X	
Discussed current events in class	X	
Variety of civics topics studied	X	
2. HOME ENVIRONMENT		
Reading/reference materials at home	X	
Language spoken at home	X	
Two-parent household	X	
Educational level of parents		X
Amount of television viewing		X
3. INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT		
Participation in student government		X
How much like to study government		X
4-year college planned after graduation		X
4. BACKGROUND/DEMOGRAPHICS		
Race	X	X
Gender		X

Table 2

Distribution of Percentage Correct on Political Knowledge Test

Percentage correct	Percentage of respondents	Unweighted N
0 to 10	0.6	22
10 to 20	0.8	32
20 to 30	2.2	103
30 to 40	6.6	311
40 to 50	10.4	489
50 to 60	13.9	640
60 to 70	18.8	797
70 to 80	21.0	864
80 to 90	18.0	700
90 to 100	7.9	317
Mean percentage correct: 66.0[a]		

[a]Based on the continuous variable.

Source: Calculated by the authors from NAEP data.

Table 3

Civics Knowledge by Amount and Recency of Civics Education

Coursework in American government or civics	Civics knowledge (mean score)[a]	Coursework in American government or civics	Civics knowledge (mean score)[a]
None	55%	None	55%
Last in 9th or 10th grade	64	Last in 9th, 10th, or 11th grade	65
Last in 11th grade	66	12th grade	68
12th grade only	70		
12th grade and earlier	67		

[a]The percentage correct on a test of 50-75 items about American government and politics. See the description in the text.

Note: Unweighted numbers of cases: Column 1--316, 456, 895, 965, 1643, respectively; Column 2--316, 1351, 2608, respectively.

Source: Calculated by the authors from NAEP data.

Table 4

Recency of Civics Education by Understanding
Of Responsibilities of the President

Coursework in American government or civics	Incorrect	Minimal	Adequate	Elaborate	Total (N)
None	10.0%	36.5	40.6	12.9	100.0 (120)
Last in 9th, 10th, or 11th grade	7.0%	39.3	35.5	18.2	100.0 (547)
12th grade	5.6%	32.0	42.1	20.3	100.0 (1113)

Note: Results are based on weighted data; however, N's shown are unweighted.

Source: Calculated by the authors from NAEP data.

Table 5

Recency of Civics Education by How Much
Elections Make Government Pay Attention to People

Coursework in American government or civics	Elections Make Government Pay Attention			Total (N)
	Not much	Some	A good deal	
None	15.4%	47.5	37.1	100.0 (299)
Last in 9th, 10th, or 11th grade	10.6%	48.8	40.6	100.0 (1332)
12th grade	9.2%	45.1	45.8	100.1 (2581)

Note: Results are based on weighted data; however, N's shown are unweighted.

Source: Calculated by the authors from NAEP data.

Table 6

Recency of Civics Education by How Much Attention Government Pays to People

Coursework in American government or civics	Government Pays Attention to People			Total (N)
	Not much	Some	A good deal	
None	33.2%	54.4	12.4	100.0 (298)
Last in 9th, 10th, or 11th grade	24.8%	60.0	15.2	100.0 (1332)
12th grade	20.9%	60.7	18.5	100.1 (2576)

Note: Results are based on weighted data; however, N's shown are unweighted.

Source: Calculated by the authors from NAEP data.

Table 7

The Effects of Structural and Individual Characteristics on Twelfth Graders' Knowledge of American Government

Variable	Civics Knowledge	Presidential Responsibilities
Constant	.239***	1.691***
	(.019)	(.157)
SCHOOL AND CIVICS CURRICULUM		
Amount/recency of civics coursework	.018***	.021
	(.004)	(.032)
Variety of civics topics studied	.028***	.091**
	(.004)	(.037)
Discussed current events in class	.010***	.023*
	(.002)	(.013)
HOME ENVIRONMENT		
Reading/reference materials at home	.016***	.036
	(.003)	(.025)
Only English spoken at home	.026***	-.002
	(.006)	(.047)
Two-parent household	.022***	-.008
	(.005)	(.045)
Educational level of parents	.014***	.084***
	(.003)	(.021)
Amount of television viewing	-.006***	.000
	(.002)	(.013)
INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT		
Participate in student government	.023***	.040
	(.004)	(.029)
Like to study government	.037***	.072**
	(.004)	(.029)
4-year college planned after graduation	.096***	.240***
	(.005)	(.040)
BACKGROUND/DEMOGRAPHICS		
Black	-.093***	-.380***
	(.007)	(.057)
Hispanic	-.064***	-.140**
	(.009)	(.069)
Male	.029***	-.057
	(.005)	(.038)
N	4104	1711
Adj. R2	.32	.10

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. ***p<.01 **<.05 *p=.07

Table 8

The Effects of Structural and Individual Characteristics on Twelfth Graders' Attitudes toward Governmental Responsiveness

Variable	Elections make government pay attention to people	Amount of attention government pays to people
Constant	1.626***	1.461***
	(.081)	(.078)
SCHOOL AND CIVICS CURRICULUM		
Amount/recency of civics coursework	.018	.035**
	(.018)	(.016)
Variety of topics studied	.111***	.079***
	(.019)	(.019)
Discuss current events in classes	.000	.001
	(.007)	(.006)
HOME ENVIRONMENT		
Reading/reference materials at home	.030**	.027**
	(.013)	(.013)
Only English spoken at home	-.012	-.048**
	(.025)	(.024)
Two-parent household	-.035	-.036
	(.024)	(.023)
Educational level of parents	.034***	.012
	(.011)	(.011)
Amount of television viewing	-.010	-.023***
	(.007)	(.007)
INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENT		
Participate in student government	.041***	.035**
	(.015)	(.015)
Like to study government	.067***	.063***
	(.015)	(.015)
4-year college planned after graduation	.050**	.057***
	(.021)	(.021)
BACKGROUND/DEMOGRAPHICS		
Black	.012	-.129***
	(.030)	(.029)
Hispanic	.036	-.062*
	(.037)	(.035)
Male	.042**	.052***
	(.020)	(.019)
N	4075	4069
Adj. R2	.04	.04

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. ***p<.01 **<.05 *p=.07

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